

Election and Policy Priorities 2025–2028

Stronger education-to-jobs pathways for Ararat, Ballarat,
Berwick, Horsham and Gippsland.





From the Vice-Chancellor

In this 2025 Federal Election, I am urging all parties to support Federation University Australia's **High Growth Community Partnership** proposal.

At its core, this proposal is straightforward: let's bring universities, TAFEs, big and small local business, and governments together in key high growth communities to decide how many local graduates we want in local jobs by 2035 – and make it a reality.

This approach will not solve every skill shortage. But in my experience serving regional and outer suburban communities, this can make a real tangible step to securing the attainment targets recommended by the Universities Accord.

It will do this while giving local learners access to careers in sectors across our regional and outer suburban communities – new technology, smart farming, infrastructure, artificial intelligence and renewable energy sectors – that can drive long-term growth.

These partnerships will achieve this by deepening how families and learners engage with local education systems, aligning education opportunities to workforce needs, and building the strongest case for higher education investment outside of our big cities.

This model can apply to high growth communities across Australia where local qualifications and attainment levels are not lining up with the available jobs.

Government support for this work is crucial: only government can mobilise community-wide action with policy settings and deliver investment beyond a smaller university's capacity. This is vital to making these partnerships work.

I understand every public dollar is precious – this is why this model ensures there is a balanced mix of roles that leverage the strengths of government, business and education institutions to deliver outcomes truly matched to the needs of our community.

Failing to act risks depriving regional local residents of access to high paying local jobs – this is what can fray social cohesion and alienate people from local development.

It will mean growth continues to drive local businesses to recruit talent from major cities at considerable premiums, damaging the competitiveness of our smaller enterprises.

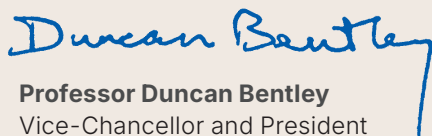
Perversely, this can also drive up cost of living locally and in the wider economy that depends on our energy, agriculture, logistics and manufacturing sectors.

Federation is already pioneering solutions as Australia's first Co-Operative Education Model based university, linking local students to local employers through credited and compulsory placements across all our programs.

Our campuses also serve as growing industry hubs, like the Mt Helen Technology Park, which supports thousands of jobs, and operate one of Australia's largest industry co-delivered higher education research programs in Ararat, Ballarat and Gippsland.

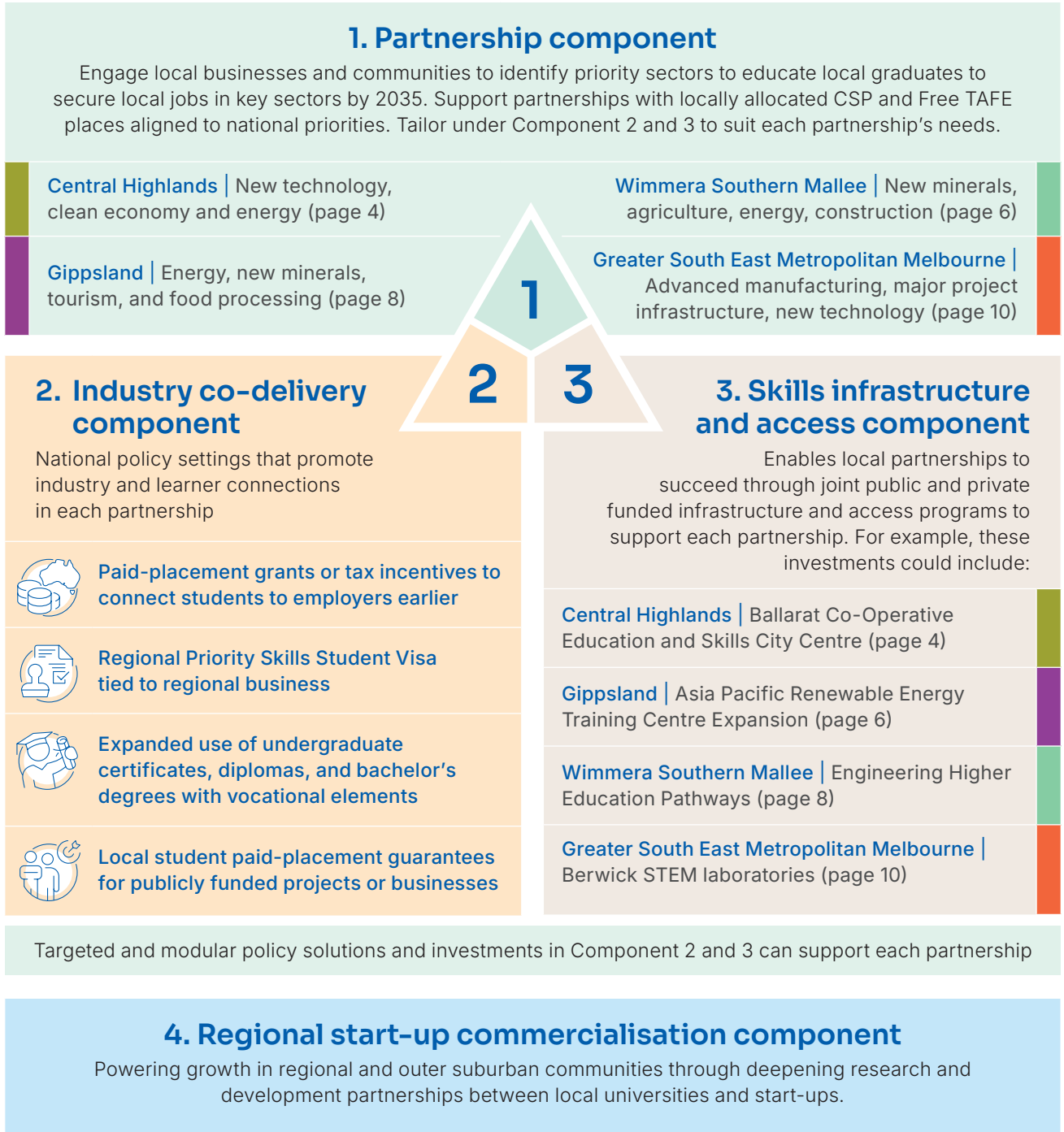
Now is the moment for decisive action to support partnerships that connect education directly to local jobs, driving regional prosperity.

I'm hoping every political party can support one or more of these partnerships – and help build a better future for the communities we serve across Ararat, Ballarat, Berwick, Horsham and Gippsland.


Professor Duncan Bentley
Vice-Chancellor and President

Election and Policy Priorities 2025 to 2028

Seeking support for High Growth Community Partnerships to create education-to-job pipelines that boost attainment and drive regional development in key communities.



Through this proposal, Federation is not just asking for support, **it is offering a solution.**

<p>A solution that ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are clear local education pathways to high-quality local employment.• Regional and outer suburban communities have the workforces to support new sectors.• Investment in regional and outer suburban education infrastructure delivers real value.	<p>In Federation University's communities, each partnership would be supported by:</p> <p>Australia's first full Co-operative Education Model across Higher Education and VET programs, featuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paid placements embedded in every course.• Course design in collaboration with industry.• Comprehensive wrap-around support to enhance student experience and maximise value (see page 20).
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Key policy outcomes

Federation welcomes the opportunity to build High Growth Community Partnerships across one or more of Victoria's regions with government.



Enhancing the coordination of higher education and research investment

Including upgrading key facilities and prioritising small-campus technology parks to deliver industry, regional development, education, skills, and job outcomes, under each partnership.



Leveraging the power of industry workplace training to boost graduate impact

Utilising Federation University's Co-operative Education Model, or similar arrangements, to connect more local students with local businesses to acquire the skills they need to make an impact.



Easing short and long term skill shortages with local talent

Offering communities access to more students and workers to ease skill shortages. Stronger connections with local students builds bigger and more stable talent pipelines for local employers.



Promoting investment in regional and outer suburban Australia

Leveraging less costly regional and outer suburban research infrastructure to commercialise innovation, and promoting new jobs opportunities where they are needed most.



Making regional and outer suburban communities more sustainable

70% of students who study in their communities, stay in their communities, promoting a more vibrant and sustainable population. Importing talent does the opposite, driving up costs and creating unstable workforces for future growth.



Making high-quality education and jobs more accessible

Promoting paid-to-learn opportunities through industry placements with local businesses eases some of the cost of study higher education and makes accessing a local job easier.



Boosting engagement in every stage of the education system

Crystallising in demand job opportunities for families and learners highlights the benefits of engaging in local education throughout early childhood, primary, secondary and post-secondary stages.



Strengthening university-TAFE collaboration and harmonisation

Working to achieve partnership goals can promote more mutual credit-recognition, the design of vocational degrees, and greater lifelong learning in communities.



Secure targeted CSP and Free TAFE allocations to community need

Clear and stable allocation of CSP and Free TAFE places can promote career planning and growth in sectors across smaller TAFE and university campuses.



Offering flexibility to local business and communities to meet their goals

Providing adaptable frameworks for local businesses, peak bodies, and governments to effectively address local demands and objectives.



Proposed partnerships and investments that can strengthen education-to-jobs pathways in Federation's communities

Federation supports boosting post-secondary attainment and education value for students in regional and outer suburban communities. Developing partnerships is key to achieving this.

Central Highlands Community Partnership | Page 4

**\$55
MILLION**
in priority partnered
public-private
investment

Key focus: To support Ballarat's clean economy and new technology aspirations through a CBD revitalising Co-Operative Education and Skills City Centre, refreshed TAFE facilities, and expanded Mt Helen Technology Park.

Gippsland Community Partnership | Page 6

**\$38
MILLION**
in priority partnered
public-private
investment

Key focus: To support the expansion of the Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Training and rapidly boost post-secondary pathways to train workforces to meet Australia's energy transition.

Wimmera Southern-Mallee Community Partnership | Page 8

**\$28
MILLION**
in priority partnered
public-private
investment

Key focus: To boost TAFE capacity, support community well-being and expand access to education to support the region's economic development and resilience.

Greater South East Metropolitan (GSEM) Community Partnership | Page 10

**\$48
MILLION**
in priority partnered
public-private
investment

Key focus: To create a STEM education network in Berwick to support the region's participation in the transition to knowledge based jobs and the development of major public infrastructure.

Partnership priority investments and settings can operate as a cohesive package or as modular components implemented separately to fit government priorities, funding envelopes, and partnership goals.

Central Highlands High Growth Community Partnership

Supporting a clean economy and advanced technology to sustain growth in the Central Highlands



Federation is seeking government support for a High Growth Community Partnership in Ballarat to create a clear education-to-jobs pipeline across advanced manufacturing, public infrastructure, health, education, and new technology sectors.

A structured legislative framework and coordinated government support can build partnerships that can deliver long-term impact, sustained local job opportunities and broader community benefits from **priority higher education investment** in infrastructure and programs, including:

- **Ballarat Co-Operative Education and Skills City Centre (\$48m):** \$10 million to revitalise the School of Mines Ballarat and Camp Street campuses to house all non-laboratory teaching in central Ballarat, followed by \$38 million to transform these campuses into a central education and skills hub with civic and commercial amenities
- **Refreshed Federation TAFE Training Facilities (\$5m):** Expanding construction and automotive trades training to support housing and infrastructure growth across the region
- **Community Teacher Training Program (~\$2.5m):** Expanding programs that support community members to gain teaching qualifications for local schools.

This proposal also includes modular investments in access programs to ensure key cohorts can access the benefits of the partnership.

Why is this partnership needed?

The Central Highlands is evolving into a clean economy and technology hub, with Ballarat driving renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, and business innovation. As the economic centre for 300,000 people in Western Victoria, Ballarat needs a skilled workforce to sustain growth and build long-term resilience.

Despite a \$7.7 billion Gross Regional Product and strong industry investment, skills gaps persist in construction, engineering, IT, business, education, and health. By 2050, Ballarat will need 17,500 additional jobs, driven by renewable energy, construction, and major regional projects like the Ballarat West Growth Area, Circular Economy Precinct, and Western Victoria Aviation Precinct.

Ballarat's health sector – the city's largest employer – faces chronic shortages, particularly in aged care, allied health, and regional hospitals.



Public-private partnership opportunity.

For example, the Ballarat Co-Operative Education and Skills City Centre could be supported by industry partnerships leveraging existing infrastructure at the expanded Mt Helen technology park.

Three components, backed by government, can realise the full value of these partnerships. Each can be adopted as a stand-alone module to reflect government priorities, maximise investment, and support delivery.

Partnership component

This component will establish High Growth Community Partnerships to align education and workforce planning with regional industry needs, supported by CSP and Free TAFE places.

Key priorities include:



Engineering and construction pathways to support major infrastructure and clean energy projects




IT and business leadership training to drive innovation and digital industry expansion




Health and education workforce development to help regional employers recruit and retain skilled professionals

Industry co-delivery component


To build a skilled and sustainable workforce, this component would leverage:




Investment from a National Paid Placement Fund and tax incentives to expand work-integrated learning across engineering, advanced manufacturing, health, education, IT, and renewable energy sectors – alongside partnerships with local career services and schools for student recruitment partnered with local employers



A Regional Priority Skills Student Visa to attract international students to areas of critical shortage, tied to extended work requirements and incentives to live and work in the region




Expanded use of undergraduate diplomas and vocational bachelor programs, co-designed with industry, offering fast-tracked pathways into high-demand careers with further study options




Paid placement requirements across diverse fields in major government-backed infrastructure projects and regional businesses

Skills infrastructure and access component


Building on the investments outlined earlier, this component would enable additional phased initiatives aligned to regional priorities, including:




Asia Pacific Regional Leadership and Growth Training Centre (~\$5m):
Delivering business and government leadership programs from the Ballarat city centre



Federation Impact Career Support Service (~\$5m):
Providing coaching and job placement support for TAFE and university graduates



Expanding Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre (APRETC) Ballarat (~\$5m):
Offering biofuel application training and re-qualification programs for energy-efficient housing and clean energy industries



In addition, this component would include targeted scholarships and bursaries to improve access:

- National Rural Local Government Leadership Accommodation Bursary (\$4m):** Supporting rural and remote council officials to complete a Diploma in Local Government Leadership
- 100 Science and Business Part Access Scholarships (\$3m):** Supporting women, First Nations students, and regional learners in STEM and business on an equity basis
- 200 High Growth Community Skills Scholarships (\$3m):** Supporting students in engineering, advanced manufacturing, education, and health through job-ready undergraduate diplomas on an equity basis

Gippsland High Growth Community Partnership

Supporting renewable energy and industry diversification to sustain regional growth in Gippsland



Federation is seeking government support for a High Growth Community Partnership in Gippsland to create a clear education-to-jobs pipeline for the region's renewable energy, infrastructure, education, and health sectors.

A structured legislative framework and coordinated government support will ensure this partnership delivers long-term economic benefits, securing sustained local job opportunities and deep community impact through **priority higher education investment** in infrastructure and programs, including:

- **APRETC Gippsland Expansion (\$3.9m):** Establishing teaching spaces, a new energy jobs portal, and a clean energy research hub, co-located with industry partners
- **Latrobe Valley Energy Careers Transition Hub (\$8m):** Creating an accessible education hub in Traralgon to support local worker retraining and school leaver engagement in new energy sectors
- **Churchill Campus Revitalisation (~\$15m):** Upgrading learning spaces to expand hydrogen education and convert the campus to operate on a net-zero basis
- **Mixed Energy Demand and Micro-Production Hub (~\$5m):** Developing five regional test sites to support micro-energy production training across rural, industrial, and commercial sites
- **Rural Student Bursary Expansion (~\$3m):** Supporting 200 rural students with high-speed satellite internet and on-campus accommodation for practical training
- **200 High Growth Community Skills Full Scholarships (~\$3m):** Supporting students from low SES, regional, and underrepresented backgrounds to complete co-designed undergraduate diplomas aligned with workforce needs.

This proposal includes modular investments in access programs to ensure the partnership benefits are open to First Nation and students from rural areas.

Why is this partnership needed?

Gippsland is leading Australia's renewable energy transition, but significant workforce challenges remain. Industry forecasts indicate growing demand for engineers, technicians, and project managers in hydrogen and clean energy sectors.

At the same time, the region requires stronger training pathways in health, business, and education to address retention issues and meet local service needs.








Gippsland continues to experience lower rates of post-secondary attainment compared to metropolitan areas. Many regional students face financial and logistical barriers to accessing qualifications in priority workforce areas.








Public-private partnership opportunity.

A partnership offers the opportunity to support public investment through collaboration with industry partners. For example, the expansion of APRETC and revitalisation of the Churchill campus could be leveraged through partnerships with employers seeking to develop specialised workforces for emerging energy industries in the region.

Three components, backed by government, can realise the full value of these partnerships. Each can be adopted as a stand-alone module to reflect government priorities, maximise investment, and support delivery.

<h3>Partnership component</h3> <p>This component will establish High Growth Community Partnerships to align education and workforce planning with Gippsland’s industry needs, supported by CSP and Free TAFE places aligned to the partnership’s goals.</p> <p>Key priorities include:</p>	<h3>Industry co-delivery component</h3> <p>To build a skilled and sustainable workforce, this component would leverage:</p>
<div><p>Engineering, science, and construction pathways to support renewable energy, clean infrastructure, and housing</p></div>	<div><div></div><p>Investments from a National Paid Placement Fund and other tax incentives to expand work-integrated learning opportunities in engineering, clean energy, construction, education and business, as well as partnerships with career services and schools to recruit students with local employers</p></div>
<div><div></div><p>Business and leadership training to strengthen regional governance, innovation, and entrepreneurship</p></div>	<div><div></div><p>A Regional Priority Skills Student Visa, targeting workforce shortages in renewable energy, infrastructure, and healthcare tied to extended work rights and incentives to live and work in the region</p></div>
<div><div></div><p>Health and education workforce development to ensure Gippsland can recruit and retain professionals in critical services</p></div>	<div><div></div><p>Expanded use of undergraduate diplomas and vocational bachelor programs, co-designed with industry partners, offering fast-tracked pathways into high-demand careers while allowing progression to further study</p></div>
	<div><div></div><p>Requirements to take more students on paid placements, across a diverse range of disciplines, in major government-backed infrastructure projects and regional businesses</p></div>

<h3>Skills infrastructure and access component</h3> <p>In addition to the priority investments outlined above, further initiatives could be developed in phases as the partnership grows, including:</p>
<div><div></div><p>Regional and Rural Allied Health Student Telehealth Expansion (~\$5m): Scaling Churchill-based services to expand digital healthcare across regional Victoria</p></div>
<div><div></div><p>Federation Healthy Lifestyle Applied Education Centre (~\$5m): Establishing a research and teaching centre in Moe focused on chronic disease prevention and community wellbeing</p></div>
<div><div></div><p>Rural and Remote Student Access Infrastructure (~\$5.5m): Developing micro-hubs in six Gippsland LGAs and launching two mobile student support centres</p></div>
<div><div></div><p>Community Teacher Training Program (~\$2.5m): Expanding programs to support community members in gaining teaching qualifications for local schools</p></div>
<div><div></div><p>This component also includes targeted funding to expand workforce participation:</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Nations Renewable Energy Negotiation Scholarships (~\$750k): Supporting First Nations students to lead land-use negotiations with renewable energy companies on an equity basis• 300 Regional STEM, Education, and Health Scholarships (~\$9m): Expanding access for women, First Nations, and rural students in high-demand fields on an equity basis</div>

Wimmera Southern Mallee High Growth Community Partnership

Strengthening regional resilience through workforce development in the Wimmera Southern Mallee



Federation is seeking government support for a High Growth Community Partnership in Wimmera Southern Mallee (WSM) to create a clear education-to-jobs pipeline for the region's renewable energy, agriculture, infrastructure, education, and health sectors.

A structured legislative framework and coordinated government support will ensure this partnership delivers long-term economic impact, securing sustained local job opportunities and deep community benefits through **priority higher education investment** in infrastructure and programs, including:

- **Federation TAFE Horsham Campus Expansion (\$6m):** Upgrading facilities for electrical, plumbing, and carpentry training to support renewables, mining, and home construction sectors
- **Ararat Student Nursing and Allied Health Clinic (\$3m):** Expanding the nursing and healthcare training pipeline to meet regional health workforce needs
- **Federation Applied Mental Health Clinic (~\$5m):** Providing student-led mental health services, strengthening community resilience and workforce capacity
- **Rural and Remote Student Access Infrastructure (~\$5.5m):** Developing regional learning hubs across five WSM LGAs and launching two mobile rural student support centres
- **Rural Student Bursary Expansion (~\$3m):** Providing 200 rural students with high-speed satellite internet access and on-campus accommodation for practical training
- **100 Local Engineering TAFE-to-Higher Education Scholarships (~\$6m):** Supporting TAFE engineering graduates to transition into higher education with advanced credit pathways.

This proposal also includes modular investments in access programs to ensure key cohorts can access the benefits of the partnership.

Why is this partnership needed?

WSM is a hub for agriculture, renewable energy, and emerging industries, but without targeted investment in education and workforce training, regional employers will struggle to secure local talent.

The region faces critical workforce shortages in engineering, construction, health, and education – particularly in renewable energy infrastructure, agricultural technology, and rural healthcare. Housing shortages and workforce migration further impact the ability of local employers to retain a skilled workforce.



Public-private partnership opportunity.

A partnership offers the opportunity to support public investments through industry collaboration. For example, the expansion of TAFE training facilities and student access programs could be supported by mixed worker and student accommodation at the Wimmera campus.

Three components, backed by government, can realise the full value of these partnerships. Each can be adopted as a stand-alone module to reflect government priorities, maximise investment, and support delivery.

Partnership component

This component will establish High Growth Community Partnerships in WSM, bringing together local governments, industry leaders, and education providers to build clear workforce pathways.

Supported by CSP and Free TAFE places, key priorities could include:



Engineering and construction training to support renewable energy projects, infrastructure development, and housing growth




Education workforce expansion to ensure rural schools have the teachers and support staff needed to improve student retention




Healthcare workforce training to strengthen nursing, allied health, and mental health services for rural communities

Industry co-delivery component


To build a skilled and sustainable workforce, this component would leverage:



Investment from a National Paid Placement Fund and other tax incentives, expanding work-integrated learning opportunities in engineering, renewable energy, health, education, and agricultural technology, and building partnerships to co-recruit students through paid placements with local career services and secondary schools with local employers



Expanded use of undergraduate diplomas and vocational bachelor programs, co-designed with industry partners, providing fast-tracked pathways into high-demand careers while allowing progression to further study



Requirements to take more students on paid placements, across a diverse range of disciplines, in major government-backed infrastructure projects and regional businesses

Skills infrastructure and access component

In addition to priority investment on the previous page, further investment and initiatives could be developed in phases as the partnership grows, including:



Food Growth and Production Skills Sustainability (~\$2m)
Expanding partnerships with providers to ensure sustainable industry skills development in the agriculture sector



Regional and Rural Allied Health Student Telehealth Expansion (~\$5m):
Scaling digital healthcare services across rural Victoria



Federation Healthy Lifestyle Applied Education Centre (~\$5m):
Establishing a community wellbeing and chronic disease prevention hub in Horsham



200 High Growth Community Skills Full Scholarships (~\$3m):
Supporting students from low SES, regional, and underrepresented backgrounds in WSM's priority workforce sectors through industry co-designed undergraduate diplomas

Greater South East Metropolitan (GSEM) Region High Growth Community Partnership

A partnership to build a future of knowledge-based, high-value jobs in Victoria's Greater South East Metropolitan Region



Federation is seeking government support for High Growth Community Partnerships for the Greater South East Metropolitan Region to create education-to-job pipelines for advanced manufacturing, public infrastructure, health, education, new technology and defence sector.

A structured legislative model and coordinated government support will ensure this partnership delivers long-term community outcomes by investing in **priority higher education investment** in infrastructure and programs to establish a network of education hubs across the region. These priority investments could be delivered in stages over four years and include:

- **Mixed-Purpose STEM and Science Laboratories at Berwick Campus (\$30m):** Expanding engineering education, supporting Chisholm TAFE and local secondary schools, and creating a technology precinct for industry collaboration
- **Federation Dandenong Advanced Technology and Design Education Hub (~\$5m):** Increasing post-secondary STEM attainment across diverse and rapidly growing communities through innovative, place-based education
- **Asia-Pacific Applied AI Training Centre (~\$5m):** Delivering AI-focused education and workforce programs in collaboration with local TAFEs and industry to support technology-related sectors such as cyber security and IT, and apply AI across various sectors
- **Federation Student Health Service Training Centre (~\$8m):** Addressing allied health workforce shortages and expanding training delivery in the Berwick region

This proposal also includes modular investments in access programs to ensure key cohorts can access the benefits of the partnership.

Why is this partnership needed?

GSEM is Australia's fastest-growing region, projected to reach two million residents by 2036. Despite generating \$85 billion in Gross Regional Product, the region experiences high rates of long-term, youth and female unemployment, along with persistent STEM skills shortages.

With transformative infrastructure projects and one of the fastest-growing advanced manufacturing sectors in Australia, GSEM has potential to become a hub for innovation and knowledge-based jobs. The region aspires to unlock 22,000 knowledge-worker roles for local residents.

Many in the region's diverse migrant communities also hold prior skills or qualifications but need accessible, supported pathways to translate them into recognised credentials to participate in the region's growth.



Public-private partnership opportunity.

A partnership offers the opportunity to support public investments with industry co-investment. For example, the development of the Berwick STEM laboratories could involve partnership with major infrastructure project contractors or advanced manufacturing firms. Similarly, the Asia-Pacific Applied Training Centre and Dandenong Technology Hub could be delivered with support from technology or AI-focused employers in the region.

Three components, backed by government, can realise the full value of these partnerships. Each can be adopted as a stand-alone module to reflect government priorities, maximise investment, and support delivery.

Partnership component

This component will involve the Commonwealth Government establishing a High Growth Community Partnership in GSEM, working with local governments, employers, and education providers to align post-secondary education pathways with regional workforce demand. CSP and Free TAFE places could be allocated to ensure there is sufficient capacity for education institutions to meet the region's needs.

Key priorities could include::



Engineering pathways to meet the needs of major infrastructure projects and the region's broader aspiration to lead in advanced technology and manufacturing




Health workforce expansion to sustain and strengthen Berwick and Dandenong's growing health precincts




Technology-driven industries – including applied AI, renewable energy, and logistics – to prepare the region for future economic growth

Industry co-delivery component


To build a skilled and sustainable workforce, this component would leverage:




Investment from a National Paid Placement Fund and other tax incentives, scaling up work-integrated learning and employer-sponsored training in high-growth sectors with GSEM employers – particularly where paid-to-learn opportunities are not currently available. This includes working with carer services and secondary schools to co-recruit students into programs with local employers



A Regional Priority Skills Student Visa, targeting international graduates with qualifications in engineering, logistics, and AI-driven industries, tied to extended work requirements and regional residency conditions



Expanded use of undergraduate diplomas and vocational bachelor programs, co-designed with industry partners, and supported by flexible accreditation settings to deliver job-ready graduates faster, with options for further study progression later in life



Requirements to take more students on paid, industry-embedded placements, across a diverse field of study in major government-backed infrastructure projects and businesses in the region

Skills infrastructure and access component

In addition to priority investment on the previous page, further investment and initiatives could be developed in phases as the partnership grows, including:



Expanding the Asia Pacific Renewable Energy Training Centre (APRETC) to Berwick (~\$5m):
Supporting hydrogen application workforce training for domestic use, micro-energy systems, and logistics – for example the decarbonisation of the road logistics sector



Federation Officer South – Co-operative Placement and Innovation Hub (~\$3m)
Embedding students in critical business precincts to support industry growth and workforce integration in the GSEM region



Scholarships to Support Local Participation (~\$3m):
Supporting 150 students from low SES backgrounds, women, and culturally diverse communities to pursue study in high-growth fields of technology via undergraduate diplomas or bachelor's degrees in critical disciplines

Incentivising start-ups across regional and outer suburban communities

A capital-matching incentive can attract start-up investment and embed R&D in innovation precincts.

Federation proposes a \$50 million Regional and Outer Suburban Community Start-Up Fund to attract capitalised start-ups to undertake eligible R&D in partnership with universities in regional and outer suburban areas.

This targeted funding will reward companies that raise early-stage capital and commit to conducting R&D as part of the proposed High Growth Community Partnerships. It provides a mechanism to anchor high-growth businesses locally, ensuring national innovation investment flows into the communities where costs are lower and there is significant room for growth.



These partnerships will generate new growth opportunities

Regional and outer suburban industries such as defence, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, logistics, and agritech need more localised research and commercialisation activity. Start-ups in these sectors rarely base their research in regional and outer suburban Australia.

Seed and Series A stages of funding – between \$1 million and \$15 million – represent a window where businesses are hiring teams, developing infrastructure, and beginning to commercialise IP. This is when policy incentives can shape where and how that R&D occurs.



Creating targeted incentives for start-up co-location and growth

This proposal captures that window by incentivising capital raising in partnership with regional universities, rewarding companies that base R&D in local precincts and contribute to sovereign capability.

Under this approach a Regional Start-Up Credit would be provided to eligible start-ups based on new capital raised and total capitalisation when they partner with regional and outer suburban universities to conduct qualifying R&D:

Stage	Capital Raised	Regional Start-Up Credit	Added to R&D Expenditure	Indicative Maximum Refund ¹
Seed	\$1m–\$2m	10% of eligible capital	Up to \$200,000	Up to \$87,000
Series A	\$2m–\$15m	25% of eligible capital	Up to \$3.75 million	Up to \$1.63 million

¹ Under this policy, other R&D expenses may boost refunds or offsets. Assumes company has turnover under \$20 million and qualifies for the 43.5% refundable R&D tax offset. Actual realised benefit may be lower and is subject to R&D Tax Incentive eligibility, turnover, and intensity rules.

This approach adds to the company's eligible R&D expenditure under the R&D Tax Incentive, increasing the funding companies can invest in research with a university partner.

Eligibility criteria

To qualify, a company must:

- Have raised between \$1 million and \$15 million in equity capital (cash-based, not in-kind or debt-based) within five years of the scheme starting
- Be undertaking eligible R&D expenditure under the R&D Tax Incentive
- Be formally partnered with a university or TAFE through a High Growth Community Partnership
- Be co-located on a regional or outer suburban campus or recognised university-affiliated innovation precinct – that is, a significant proportion of workers based on campus
- Have a project endorsed by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources as aligned with one or more national priority sectors:
 - Defence and national security
 - Renewable energy and low emissions
 - Advanced manufacturing and digital capability
 - Agritech and food security
 - Cybersecurity, big data and AI
 - Logistics and sovereign capability



Unlocking investment and anchoring research locally

If adopted, this policy would:

- Encourage investors to support ventures that are committed to working with universities
- Anchor commercial R&D in regional precincts where it has the greatest economic and social impact
- Leverage private capital to grow the regional innovation economy
- Reward the development of high-value, job-creating enterprises in national priority sectors.

National equity safeguard



To ensure geographic equity and national reach:

- No more than 10% of the total fund (\$5 million) may be allocated to any single State or Territory in the first two years
- In years three to five, this cap applies only if the fund remains undersubscribed, enabling proposals to access remaining funding regardless of jurisdiction.

Relationship with R&D Tax Incentive



The Regional Start-Up Credit is treated as additional R&D expenditure, enhancing the total claimable amount.

The actual benefit received by an entity depends on:

- **Turnover:**
 - <\$20 million = eligible for 43.5% refundable tax offset (cash refund);
 - \$20 million = eligible for non-refundable offset, subject to intensity test.
- The nature of R&D activity and how it fits within the R&D Tax Incentive rules.

This structure complements, rather than replaces, existing R&D support and leverages the Commonwealth's tax framework to support regional innovation.

Impact



The Regional and Outer Suburban Community Start-Up Fund could support:

- 40–50 capitalised start-ups to conduct R&D regionally
- Over \$300 million in combined public and private investment in sovereign capability
- Long-term job creation, infrastructure investment, and commercialisation across regional Australia.

A High Growth Community Partnership model can also boost education-to-job pathways across Australia

These policy settings could be applied at key prioritised Australian regions facing critical workforce shortages, economic shifts, and infrastructure challenges that threaten their long-term liveability and economic growth.

Other Australian communities this model can apply to:

Greater Perth (Armadale, Joondalup, Rockingham, Midland)

Key industries:
Defence, New Energy, Mining and Resources, Manufacturing

Pressing issues:
Gaps in workforce training for defence and resources industries, regional job drain, lack of targeted university pathways

Barossa (North Adelaide)

Key industries:
Space Industry, Defence, Advanced Manufacturing

Pressing issues:
Insufficient local talent pipeline for emerging industries, high skills import reliance, lack of graduate transition programs

Western Sydney (Penrith, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Blacktown)

Key industries:
Construction, Logistics, Health, Advanced Technology

Pressing issues:
High youth unemployment, skills mismatch with local industry, lack of paid industry placements to transition graduates into jobs

South East Queensland (Logan, Ipswich, Moreton Bay, Gold Coast)

Key industries:
Renewable Energy, Healthcare, Engineering, Tourism

Pressing issues:
Underemployment despite population growth, weak links between education and local industries, limited upskilling opportunities



These High Growth Community Partnerships **answer a powerful call to action** across Australia while offering constructive policy solutions

1 Increasing education engagement

There is an urgent need to strengthen confidence that education leads to employment, particularly in regional and outer suburban communities where concerns about job security, wage stagnation, and rising student debt are prominent.

Federation's experience is that too many learners in regional and outer suburban communities do not see education as a value-add to their personal circumstances.

A lack of clearly accessible local employment pathways in the regions and outer suburbs is compounding disengagement as early as the early childhood stages of education, with flow on impacts to skills and qualifications outcomes later in life.

Only
20–30%
of regional Australians
aged 25–34 hold a
university qualification
compared to nearly
double that in
metropolitan areas.

2 More sustainable workforces in key communities

A highly skilled workforce is Australia's most significant economic asset, yet disparities in educational access and employment pathways risk undermining national productivity.

Other countries nations, such as China, Germany and Canada have successfully integrated industry focused education to power national industry strategies. Adopting the same model can ensure Australia does not face:

- Diminished competitiveness in advanced industries and innovation.
- Increased reliance on imported skilled labour, raising long-term workforce costs.
- Widening regional economic disparities, impacting national economic cohesion.



We invite further consultation
on these proposals:
publicpolicy@federation.edu.au

For media enquiries, email:
media@federation.edu.au

3 Attracting more investment that grows communities

Without clear investment in education-to-jobs pathways there are several critical risks:

- Economic stagnation and population decline puts local services and businesses under more pressure
- Communities face job-market misalignment, with local employment growth not keeping pace with workforce needs, increasing commuting costs and infrastructure strain.
- Growing place-based inequalities contribute to poorer health, mental health, wellbeing outcomes, and fraying social cohesion.

4 Offering a platform to make education more accessible for regional, remote and outer suburban students

Supporting a significant boost to post-secondary attainment will require applying different modes of education delivery.

Partnership models can offer an opportunity to design online education service delivery and targeted interventions, including specific access programs, education supports and access, with partners. This can support boosted post-secondary attainment in priority cohorts such as First Nations, First in Generation, Disability and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Part-Time working and Carer cohorts.



5 Filling key skill shortages and needs

Australia faces critical skills shortages in industries essential to economic growth, national security, and community wellbeing:



Health and Aged Care

A projected

200,000+

worker shortfall by 2030, with regional hospitals struggling to attract healthcare professionals



Renewable Energy

Over

30,000

skilled workers needed for offshore wind, solar, and hydrogen, yet regional training pathways remain underdeveloped.



Advanced Manufacturing and Defence

A projected

100,000+

worker shortfall in engineering and skilled trades, threatening major infrastructure and defence projects.

6 Enhancing the role of international students in regional and outer suburban communities

This proposal advances the International Education and Skills Strategic Framework by supporting a fairer, more coordinated international education system – one that sustains regional providers and aligns with a targeted migration strategy.

International students are essential to keeping regional and outer suburban campuses viable – areas the University Accord identifies as facing lower domestic student demand. Without them, critical programs and skills pipelines may become unsustainable.

Embedding the Regional Priority Student Skills Visa into a formal partnership model would create a transparent, place-based system that attracts students who genuinely want to live and learn in these communities. By connecting students to local employers and community life, this model would support regional migration pathways – deepening local workforce capacity, boosting productivity, and strengthening long-term regional sustainability.

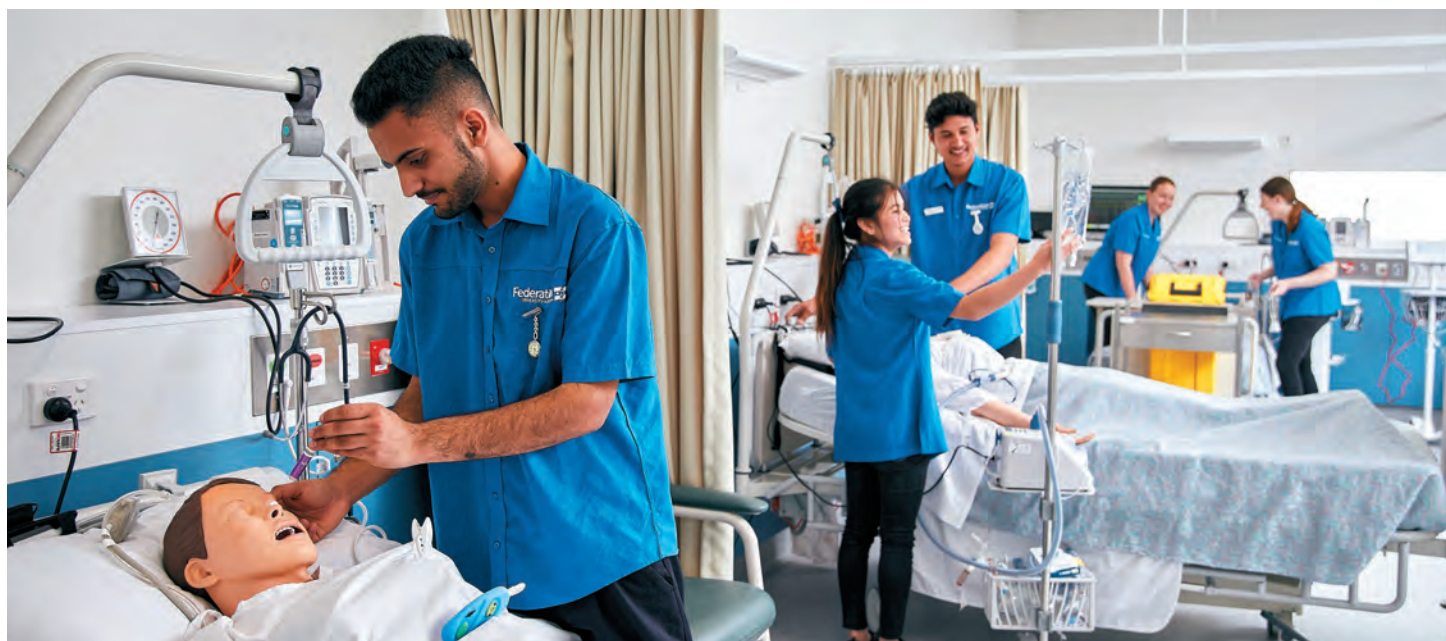
7 Substantiating CSP and Free TAFE allocations to support local equity demand driven growth

This proposal responds to the University Accord's call to lift educational attainment in ways that also build Australia's long-term strategic and regional advantage.

A managed equity demand model is needed to ensure education funding – particularly Commonwealth Supported Places and Free TAFE – is allocated to programs that are small in scale but vital to regional communities and future workforce needs.

Using this model with employer-backed partnerships strengthens the case for targeted resourcing, ensuring funding supports programs with demonstrated local demand and relevance. It also enables closer collaboration with secondary schools and prospective learners, supported by targeted incentives, to create clearer pathways from school to post-secondary study.

This approach sends stronger signals to learners, improves local engagement, and drives a place-based uplift in attainment, equity, and economic opportunity.



What Federation University delivers for its communities

1 A multi-campus dual sector university serving targeted communities across Victoria

- Dual-sector university campuses in small communities – 18,000 students across Ararat, Ballarat, Berwick, Horsham and Gippsland (~13,000+ university students, ~5,000 TAFE students).

2 Focused on offering accessible pathways to local jobs

- Delivering on access with over 50% of students from equity backgrounds, including 21.7% of students from low SES or disadvantaged backgrounds, 36.5% first in family, and 50.3% from regional or remote locations.

3 Training graduates that care for and educate Victorians

- Current student cohorts are primarily in health and education fields.

4 Proactively supporting each communities economic and community development priorities

- Recognising the critical need to offer local students better pathways – especially into technology, business and engineering programs – Federation is becoming Australia's first Co-Operative Education University with over 100 industry partners now in place and over 150 students in placement growing to over 1000 by 2027.
- Supporting the development of vibrant technology and innovation sectors in these communities with technology parks attracting business investment into technology and innovation parks across Victoria.

5 Protecting student safety and acting with integrity

- Improved risk-ratings achieved under the Simplified Student Framework in 2024.
- Strong governance arrangements with student and union representation.
- No tolerance for, or reporters issues of, politically motivated religious discrimination on campus.

#1 in Victoria and #2 in Australia for full-time postgraduate employment

95.3% of postgraduate coursework students are in full-time employment earning a median salary of AUD\$94,500*

#2 in Victoria for full-time undergraduate employment

80.8% of undergraduate students are in full-time employment earning a median salary of AUD\$71,400*

#1 in Australia for First Generation enrolments for the seventh year in a row



Five stars for Skills Development

#1 in Victoria for Social Equity for the eighth year in a row

#1 in Victoria for Student-Teacher ratio

Ranked #175 in the top young universities in the world°

Excellence in research

Our research excellence is reflected in the latest Excellence for Research Australia assessment, where Federation was rated at or above world standard in 80% of our submitted Fields of Research. We are among the top ten Australian universities for industry-connected graduate research programs.

*QILT Graduate Outcomes Survey 2023

^ 2025 Good Universities Guide

°Times Higher Education Young University Rankings 2024

Strategic Plan 2021–2025



Transforming lives

Broad access, diversity, and inclusion, acknowledging our Indigenous heritage



Enhancing communities

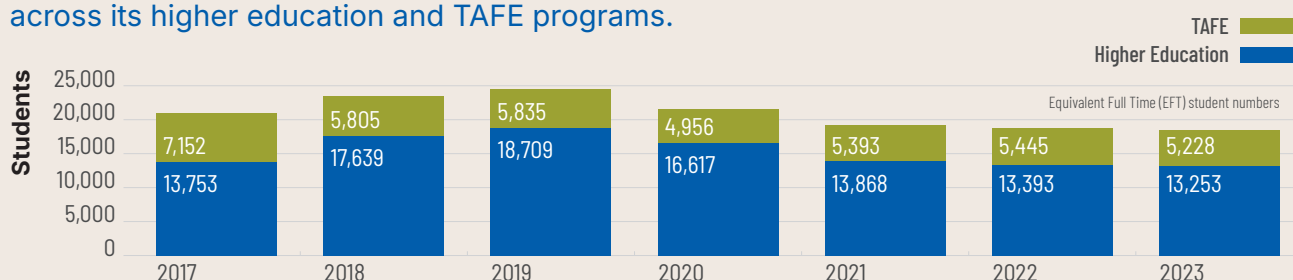
Research that drives economic and social transformation from regional Australia to all of our communities



A strong and sustainable University

First choice employer and destination for students in each of our communities

Federation University serves close to 20,000 students annually across its higher education and TAFE programs.



Federation University

Undergraduate, postgraduate and other programs at higher education level:

- Allied health
- Arts, criminology and criminal justice
- Business
- Education and early childhood
- Engineering
- Information technology
- Nursing, midwifery and paramedicine
- Occupational health and safety
- Pathways
- Performing arts
- Psychology
- Social work, community and human services
- Science and mathematics
- Sport, outdoor and physical education
- Visual arts
- Biomedical Science
- Exercise and Sport Science
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Environment and Conservation
- Veterinary and Wildlife Science
- Engineering – civil, electrical, mechanical, mining and mechatronics
- Sport Management
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech Pathology
- Physiotherapy
- Graduate Research

Research Centres

- Centre for eResearch and Digital Innovation (CeRDI)
- Centre for New Energy Transition Research (CfNETR)
- Centre for Smart Analytics (CSA)
- Collaborative Evaluation Research Centre (CERC)
- Future Regions Research Centre (FRRC)
- Health Innovation and Transformation Centre (HITC)

Federation TAFE

Certificate, diploma and advanced diploma programs:

- Automotive
- Building and Construction
- Building Design
- Business and Management
- Children's Services
- Commercial Cookery
- Community Services and Health
- Electro technology and communications
- Food Sciences
- Foundation Studies
- Hair and Beauty
- Horticulture and Conservation and Land Management
- Information Technology
- Language, literacy and numeracy
- Metals and Engineering
- Nursing
- Prisons Education
- Training and Education
- Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
- Wholesale, retail and personal services

Federation University is continuously reviewing and managing its resources to meet community need within a limited CSP and budget envelope.

Federation's Co-operative Education Model

Australia's first full Co-operative Education Model integrates academic study with fully credited practical work experiences and university-brokered paid placements.

Students apply classroom learning directly in the workplace, building networks and gaining industry insights. Paid experiences are prioritised where feasible, with structured support embedded throughout the student journey to accelerate career outcomes.

The Co-operative Education Model addresses skill shortages by involving industry stakeholders in the co-design of courses, aligning learning outcomes with real-world workforce needs.

For regional communities, the model supports economic growth by producing skilled local graduates who understand regional business needs and contribute from day one.

Work and world-ready graduates

Students complete mandatory career development units to prepare for workplace participation during placements. Transferable world ready skills are embedded to ensure graduates are employment-ready, regardless of background or previous experience.

Real experience in chosen professions

As part of the Co-Operative Education Model, students undertake a minimum of 60 days (30 days for postgraduate students) paid placement that is:

- Fully credited toward their qualification
- Formally arranged, brokered or endorsed by the university
- Completed full-time over one semester, part-time across a longer period, or in blocks embedded into specific subjects
- Designed for flexibility while ensuring consistency with academic standards and course learning outcomes.

Co-design, co-develop and co-delivered with industry

All co-operative experiential learning activities are:

- Structured and assessed for credit
- Delivered with academic oversight and institutional support to support student learning outcomes and ensure work environments offer a safe and respectful student experience
- Co-designed to directly address identified workforce needs and to integrate employer-led paid placement opportunities.



The Co-operative Education Model at Federation TAFE

Federation TAFE, the vocational education and training division of Federation University Australia also delivers the Co-Operative Education Model through strong connections with local industries and employers.

From 2025, all TAFE courses will incorporate structured, assessed Co-operative Experiential Learning activities. These placements are:

- Fully integrated into course design
- Brokered or approved by the university
- Delivered as part of a phased three-year rollout across programs
- Co-designed with business partners to provide paid placements aligned to specific workforce or enterprise needs.

Co-op in the Graduate Research School

In our Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) environment, co-op involves working with industry partners to co-design, co-supervise and co-fund HDR projects and provides opportunities for our PhD candidates to undertake research internships with industry.

Federation's Graduate Research School has a long history of success in HDR industry partnerships, which has seen \$4 million in direct research funding to Federation since 2021.

Federation also remains first in Victoria (and 5th nationally) for the proportion of our HDR candidates engaged with industry, while also ranking second in Australia, and first in Victoria for post-graduate employment rate.

Collaboration through the Federation Co-Operative Education Model and Technology Parks

Federation University's Technology Parks, Hubs and Centres operate as applied innovation precincts – bringing business, research and community together in practical, outcome-driven partnerships.

Businesses work with the university to co-design staff development, provide student placements, and collaborate on applied research aligned to their needs. Activities are structured, credit-bearing where appropriate, and brokered or supported through formal university processes.

Federation has technology parks, centres and hubs spanning Victoria from Ararat, Ballarat, Mt Helen and Morwell Innovation Centre.

Supporting High Growth Partnerships can expand this model in the Greater South East Metropolitan region. For example, it can support a business case for STEM laboratories in Federation's Berwick Campus. This can act as an innovation space for start-ups and a shared facility for emerging industry in addition to offering modern teaching spaces.

Federation Technology Parks and hubs provide a platform for major innovation projects. For example, the Internet Commerce Security Laboratory at the Ballarat site focuses on cyber crime and digital forensics and collaborates with national law enforcement and security agencies.

In 2024 the Morwell Innovation Centre became home to an AI Adoption Hub. This partnership between RedgridGPT and Federation University – supported by Commonwealth funding – helps regional industries apply artificial intelligence to real-world challenges in sectors such as agriculture, forestry and energy.

Applied research and innovation also extend into health and agribusiness. Partnerships such as the Fiona Elsey Cancer Research Institute at Ballarat and the emerging Ararat Jobs and Technology Precinct bring together business, researchers, and government to solve challenges and grow regional capability.

Federation Technology Parks are also integrated with the Federation Co-Operative Education Model, providing a pipeline for placements and workforce upskilling. They also support the growth of regional businesses and help deliver long-term economic and social outcomes for the community.





Acknowledgement of Country

Federation University Australia acknowledges the Custodians of the lands and waters where our campuses are located and recognises their continuing responsibilities to care for country at these sites of teaching and learning. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations peoples.

The Aboriginal Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where our campuses, centres and field stations are located include:

Ballarat:	Wadawurrung
Berwick:	Boon Wurrung
Gippsland:	Gunaikurnai Nations
Melbourne:	Wurundjeri
Nanya Station:	Mutthi Mutthi and Barkindji
Wimmera:	Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, Jupagulk

National Centre for Reconciliation, Truth, and Justice

The National Centre for Reconciliation, Truth, and Justice explores regional and national understandings and engagements regarding reconciliation, truth and justice, across industry, academic and community settings. This work is conducted through a rich program of education, engagement, outreach and research activities.



Federation.edu.au
1800 333 864 (1800 FED UNI)
International phone: +61 3 5327 9018

     /feduniaustralia

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